CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD HOME

Cape Cod HOA & Condo Associations: What Buyers Must Know Before They Sign

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.

Not every Cape Cod home is a freestanding cottage on its own lot. A meaningful share of the market — condos, townhouses, planned communities, and shared-beach associations — comes with a homeowners or condo association, and with it a set of rules, fees, and financial realities that can make or break a purchase. Buyers who skim the association documents at closing are the ones who get surprised by a special assessment or a rental ban six months later. Here's what to check before you sign. (Association rules and finances are specific to each community — always review the actual governing documents and financials for the specific property before you buy.)

Where you'll run into associations on the Cape

Type	What it usually governs
Condo association	Building/complex maintenance, shared systems, exterior, rules
HOA / planned community	Common areas, roads, amenities, architectural rules
Beach / road association	Shared beach access, private road upkeep, dues

Even some single-family homes on the Cape belong to a **beach or road association** — a smaller, informal-feeling group that still collects dues and controls shared access. Don't assume "single-family" means "no association."

What association membership means for you

- **Monthly or annual fees** that fund maintenance, insurance on common elements, and reserves.
- **Rules and restrictions** — which can include limits on renovations, exterior changes, pets, and (critically on the Cape) **short-term rentals.**
- **Shared decision-making** and the possibility of **special assessments** for big-ticket common repairs.
- **A master insurance policy** on common elements — which affects what your own policy needs to cover.

The short-term-rental question (do this first if you'll rent)

This is the make-or-break item for many Cape buyers: **many condo and HOA documents restrict or ban short-term rentals.** If your plan is to rent the property to summer vacationers, you *must* confirm the association allows it — and under what conditions — *before* you buy. A great STR-income property is worthless as an investment if the association forbids rentals. Read the rules, don't assume.

The documents to demand and read

Before closing on any association property, get and actually read:

1. **The governing documents** — declaration/bylaws, and the rules & regulations (especially rental rules).
2. **The current budget and fee schedule** — what you'll pay and what it covers.
3. **Reserve study / reserve fund status** — is the association saving for big repairs, or underfunded?
4. **Meeting minutes** (recent) — reveal looming issues, disputes, and planned assessments.
5. **Any pending or planned special assessments** — a big one right after you buy is a nasty surprise.

6. **The master insurance policy** — so you know what your own policy must cover.

Red flags to watch for

- **Underfunded reserves** — signals future special assessments.
- **Deferred maintenance** on the buildings or common areas.
- **A history of large special assessments** or litigation.
- **Rental restrictions** that conflict with your plans.
- **Rapidly rising fees.**

How to buy an association property smart

- **Read the rental rules first** if income is part of the plan.
- **Review the financials and reserves** — a healthy association protects your investment.
- **Budget the fees** into your true cost of ownership.
- **Check meeting minutes** for what's coming.
- **Ask about the last and next special assessments.**

Don't miss: reading the actual governing documents and the association's financials before you sign — not skimming them at the closing table. On Cape Cod, an association can be a wonderful thing (shared beach, maintained grounds, less to worry about) or a financial and lifestyle trap (rental bans, special assessments, underfunded reserves). The documents tell you which one you're buying — so read them while you can still walk away.

Headed to the Cape with friends? Share this guide.

Every share helps a real local business get found — and keeps Cape Cod guides free. Scan to send it along.

Explore Cape Cod Certified →

FOR CAPE COD BUSINESSES

This is what being Cape Cod Certified looks like.

You just read a guide that travelers and locals download, keep, and share. The businesses inside it were chosen on merit — real vetting, real local knowledge, never pay-to-play.

Own a Cape Cod business? Get Certified and earn your place in guides like this one — in front of the exact people planning their trip and their spend.

Get Certified → capecodcertified.com/join